BEATRIX RANDOLPH

By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

"Say, my boy, what's your game?" inquired the other after a pause, during which the men had looked intently at each other. "Do you want me to pay you her salary, and you hand her over whatever doesn't stick to your fingers—is that it? He! he! he!"

"You're a coarse minded idiot," said Jocelyn brusquely. "You attend to your business and let me manage mine. I know what I want and how to get it. If she's not all I say she is, of course the bargain's off altogether. If she is, you'll have to pay for her—that's all. And if you don't like those terms you can get out of your scrape yourself—if you can!"

"You ought to be a rich man, my boy, one of these fine days," remarked the impresario meditatively. "Well, if she comes up to your report I'll agree. But if she doesn't"——

"If she doesn't I'll stand the railway fare there and back!" said Jocelyn, and with that they laughed and rose from the table. As they were passing out of the room a tall young man, with a thick brown beard and severe blue eyes, met them in the doorway. He had a roll of paper in his hand.

"You're the man I'm looking for," he said to Inigo.

"Halloo, Bellingham!" said Jocelyn. "How comes on the Temple of the Muses?"

"All right," replied the gentleman so addressed, rather curtly, as his manner was. He looked at Inigo and added, "There's a point about the construction of the stage entrance I must consult you on."

"I'm in a devil of a hurry," objected the impresario reluctantly.

"I want only ten minutes," Bellingham said.

"You architects are worse than—oh, by the way, I can't decide about it till to-morrow anyhow," exclaimed the other, as Bellingham began to unroll his paper. He glanced at Jocelyn and went on, "Come to the office to-morrow afternoon and we'll fix it."

"The workmen will have to wait," said Bellingham.

"Everybody has to do that," returned the impresario sententiously, and with a nod he and Jocelyn went out.

CHAPTER II.

HOW LOVELY AND UNFORTUNATE SHE WAS.

"Music is a sacred thing, my child," he would often say to her.

What is more worthy the contemplation of a humane mind than the spectacle of a pretty young woman? It is the least selfish of all pleasures. By learning we seek to elevate ourselves above our fellows; by philosophy, to console ourselves for the past and to fortify ourselves for the future; by religion (as it is commonly practiced), to make ourselves respectable in this world and comfortable in the world to come. But he who stands rapt in the fascination of a girl's beauty enjoys the possession by another of what he can never have himself, admits his inferiority and generously exults in the existence of goodness for its own sake. The sole drawback is the risk he runs of falling in love—that is, of wishing to restrict to himself a blessing designed to rejoice mankind at large.

It might seem a pity that such a girl as Beatrix Randolph should be so situated as not to have it in her power to confer upon every one the unselfish gratification whereof we speak. But to be rare and difficult of access are among the conditions of mortal loveliness. In no other way, perhaps, could the heavenly aroma be preserved; and were we to become callous to beauty, as we do to pain, life would have nothing left to promise us. On the other hand, dullness is negative, delight positive, and a single day of glorious sunshine compensates for a whole blank week of lifeless landscape and leaden sky.

But Beatrix, though delightful to look upon, was not beauty in the abstract; she was first of all a distinct and concrete human person. It is fitting, therefore, to consider not so much the loss the world sustained by her seclusion, as its effect upon herself. Certainly she was not of a temperament naturally inclined to solitude. She was quick to feel emotions of all kinds, and apt and simple in the expression of them. Her proportions, both of the soul and the body, were symmetrical and active; as she moved easily and sweetly, so was she sweetly and easily moved. Her life, in spite of its circumscribed conditions, showed an instinctive love of largeness and variety, and herein she was helped by a generous and lively imagination. She could not read a story or watch the sun rise without engendering in her mind a thousand fresh ideas of the possibilities of existence. And her body was in such fine harmony with her spirit that you could see a stirring thought turn to roses in her cheeks, or conjure diamonds to her lovely eyes. When she came forth in the morning from her maiden chamber, having put on, let us say, a fresh, white gown, just crisp enough to whisper as she stepped, and a pink or a blue ribbon (as fancy might dictate) at her throat and on her hair, and her figure elastic and alert with the wholesome vigor of nineteen years, and a mouth that laughed fragrance and music, and large brown eyes, which besides being as beautiful as possible in themselves were rendered yet more so by being a few shades darker than her rippled hair and * * * and hands that were white wonders of warm flexibility and tapering softness; when this exquisite young American girl, in short—type of the most charming and most intelligent womanhood in the world—came dawning like Aurora out of the room in which she had been dreaming visions only less lovely than herself, it did seem as if the Golden Age were now about to begin, and as if nothing false or impure were henceforward possible. She explained, without uttering a word, why the grass in spring is so deliciously green, the sky of so tender a blue, why birds sing and water is transparent, why violets have perfume, and the sun warmth. She was the spoken secret of the universe—the interpretation of its fairest elements. By what mishap, then, was such a creature confined (as she was) to a few square miles of village land in the center of the state of New York? Was such a pearl created only to be cast before cattle, and the village grocer's son, and the hollow chested young Unitarian minister, and the innkeeper's daughters? The world could not afford it, and yet there she was, and just at the time this story begins there seemed to be rather less probability than usual of her ever getting anywhere else.

She lived with her father in a roomy broad beamed, brown old house, environed by elm trees taller, but less antique, than itself. It was an American Eighteenth century house. Some hero of the Revolution had passed a night in it. It stood on the side of a low, gradual hill, and was four miles away from the nearest railway station. Altogether the region was sufficiently remote, though New York city was hardly more than three hours distant by rail. The mail arrived twice a day, and Mr. Alexander Randolph, the owner of the house and estate, received yesterday's World every forenoon, and read it during the hour preceding dinner, which always took place at 3 o'clock. It was an eminently conservative household; at all events its master was a conservative and a democrat, as his fathers had been before him.

These forefathers were of Virginian descent, and two generations ago had owned large plantations in the south. But the young Randolph of that epoch had fallen in love with a northern lady, and ended by marrying her and settling down on this estate, which was his bride's dowry.

He was originally quite wealthy, but lost money by speculations during the war. With intent to compel a better fortune he soon after ran for an office, but was defeated, as a foregone conclusion, by a crushing majority. To crown all he lost his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached. She died of typhoid fever in 1868. He was left with two children, a boy of 10 and a girl of 6. Mr. Randolph, though of a haughty and headstrong character, was not what is called thorough. He was tall and of slender build, with high shoulders, a gray mustache and imperial, and thick, wavy hair, growing rather long. His eyebrows were bushy and overhanging, and gave to his eyes a fiercer expression than might otherwise have belonged to them; he had a habit of twisting them between his thumb and finger when in thought, which looked ominous to strangers, but really amounted to nothing. His fingers were very long, and so were his arguments and discussions; almost the only short thing about him, in fact, being his temper. His general aspect was that of a retired southern brigadier whose slaves had been unrighteously made contraband. His expression was, ordinarily, profoundly serious, and he smiled rarely; but it was not difficult to make him break into a shrill, giggling laugh, which absurdly marred the severe contour of his visage and betrayed the underlying weakness.

He was fond of phrases, and had a fancy for calling himself "the most indulgent of fathers," but whenever his children transgressed the moral law of their father's good humor or indolence—and this was not seldom the case with Ed, who was as restless and independent as a hawk—he fell upon them with sweeping broadsides of rebuke, culminating, if they answered him back, in violent assertions of their total depravity. Ed was sent to school, but the study of books had no part in his scheme of existence. In the boy's seventeenth year Hamilton Jocelyn, a friend of the family, being on a visit of a few days to the Randolphs, was tickled by Ed's bearing and the story of his exploits, and offered to take him back with him to New York city for a month or so, to give him instruction in the laws and amenities of polite society.

He went off accordingly, and the month had prolonged itself to six before he came back. His father thought that he had been improved by his sojourn there. He had brought back with him certainly a great deal of entertaining talk, and gave Beatrix endless accounts of the great city, its streets, its houses, its horses, its theatres: above all, of its operas and its concerts. Both she and Ed had always been passionately devoted to music. They had understood it, by the light of nature, as it were, from a very early age, and had constantly practiced ever since. Ed's voice was not of much use, but he was an admirable performer on the violin. Beatrix, on the other hand, was above all things a singer, and her voice developed into a soprano of remarkable range and power. Her studies were not confined to church music. She knew by heart all the great operas and oratorios, and in pursuance of the marked dramatic ability which she possessed she had, with Ed's assistance, acted out scenes from many of the former (so far as two performers might) on the stage of the back drawing room.

One day Hamilton Jocelyn, who had heard all the famous singers of the world in his time, attended one of these private entertainments. Contrary to expectation he turned out to be the most eulogistic auditor that Beatrix had ever had, and he wound up his praises by declaring that she must be provided with a master to bring her voice out. The most indulgent of fathers was gratified by this tribute of admiration from such a source to his favorite child, and a week or so afterward the master was sent for.

This was an elderly Englishman of respectable antecedents, who, twenty years before, had begun his musical career with what was considered the finest tenor voice of the age, and whose knowledge of the principles of music was as profound as his proficiency was remarkable. But before he had been a year on the operatic stage the theatre in which he was singing caught fire, and he was burned about the throat in such a way as forever to destroy the voice which would have made him rich and famous enough to satisfy ambition itself. Professor Dorimar, as he afterward came to be called, had some small private means which rendered him in a humble way independent, and with a philosophical serenity which rarely characterizes the musical temperament he settled quietly down to be a writer on the art and science of whose highest triumphs he could never more hope to partake. For the last eight years he had lived in New York, but he was known to very few. He sat with his piano and his manuscripts, and his visions of divine harmonies, in a retired little room a few blocks west of Washington square, and seldom went forth save to listen for half an hour to one or other of the very few singers who in his judgment were great enough to sing. He never was known to have undertaken the personal instruction of pupils, though he might undoubtedly have derived a large income from so doing. But he was of opinion that the right to use the voice in music is given to but two or three in an age, and the chance that the training of one so gifted should fall to him was too remote to be considered. To the myriad chances of failure he preferred his comparative poverty and his peace of mind.

What arguments Jocelyn employed to woo him from his reserve cannot be known. But Mr. Randolph received a note from the professor, mentioning the day and hour of his arrival, and requesting Mr. Randolph to meet him and drive him up from the railway station alone. This was done, and on the way the professor stipulated that he should be enabled to hear Miss Randolph's voice before she was aware of his presence. "There is a train back to the city this evening, sir," he remarked, "and, if I should conclude to take it, it would be well to have spared the young lady the annoyance of an interview." The matter was readily managed. Beatrix sang with the unembarrassed freedom of supposed solitude, and the Professor listened. When the young lady had finished her selection, whatever it was, she rose from the piano and passed out through the open window of the room to the veranda. Here she was surprised by the appearance of a meager and pallid personage, of gentlemanly bearing and aspect, with a broad scar on the right side of his face and throat, and many thoughtful lines and wrinkles on his brow and around his eyes, who advanced toward her with a bow and took her hand. As she looked at him she fancied there were tears in his eyes. "Miss Randolph," he said, in a low and very pleasant voice, "I am to have the honor of being your instructor; my name is Dorimar." He said no more at that time, but raised her soft fingers to his lips, and with another bow disappeared. He did not take the evening train back to the city, but on the contrary took up his abode in the Randolphs' house, and being, in addition to his musical attainments, a man of cultivation, and of a singular naive charm of character, he was nearly as much of an acquisition to Mr. Randolph as to his daughter, and they all became very good friends. As to his teaching, it was a matter between his pupil and himself, and was not often referred to outside. It seemed to afford him especial pleasure to think that Beatrix was singing for music's sake, and without any purpose of publishing or profiting by her acquirements. "Music is a sacred thing, my child," he would often say to her, "and like all sacred things it is shamefully and almost universally desecrated. It is not a mere question of voice and ear, but of purity and loftiness of soul. Great music never was greatly sung by a charlatan, or a libertine, or a fortune hunter. I, for my part, thank God that you are what you are, and that you will never be obliged to weigh your music against gold. The world may listen to you if it can, but you shall be spared the insult of receiving for it what it dares to call recompense!"

Beatrice acquiesced in all this wisdom, but somewhere in her secret soul she may have cherished the germ of an ambition to meet great multitudes of her fellow creatures, to test herself upon them, perhaps to delight and inspire them, if there were power in her so to do. Three years passed, and then Ed went to Europe. There was some pretext about his attending lectures at a university of mining engineering in Saxony, but it was a tolerably transparent pretext. That he should come back at the end of two or three years somewhat toned down was the best Mr. Randolph hoped. As to the question of funds, after a good deal of meditation Mr. Randolph came to the following rather eccentric determination: Ed was to be allowed to draw on the paternal resources for whatever sums of money he from time to time might require. "You may draw little or you may draw much, my son," the old gentleman said, "and, be it much or little, all your drafts will be duly honored. I shall not restrict you nor advise you, but I shall depend upon your own sense of honor and decency, as a Randolph and a gentleman, not to abuse my confidence in you." This speech seemed to the utterer of it very noble and impressive, and also very sagacious and worldly wise. For if to put a young fellow upon his honor will not make him reasonably virtuous and economical what will? Ed certainly showed himself pleased with the arrangement, if not so much impressed by the phrases in which it was announced to him. He was an enterprising and able youth, and probably expected to make a fortune of his own rather than spend his father's.

The next thing that occurred in his eventful year was an offer of marriage, emanating from no less distinguished a personage than Hamilton Jocelyn himself. Beatrix thought it was exceedingly funny he should do such a thing, and not altogether comfortable; but as it was instinctive with her to consider other people's feelings almost as much as her own, and sometimes more, she suppressed her emotions and expressed her acknowledgments, adding that she had no idea of marrying anybody. When Jocelyn found that her resolve was not to be shaken he very gracefully said that to have known and loved her was a privilege and a revelation for which he should never cease to be indebted to her. He said that he had perhaps presumed too much in hoping that she could ever care for a grizzled old fellow like himself, but that his sentiments would never change, and that if, at any future time, circumstances should lead her to reconsider her present views, she would find him eager and grateful to throw himself at her feet. He concluded by requesting that she would forbear to mention the episode to any one, even to her father, lest the latter should be grieved to discover that she could not bring herself to consent to an alliance with his oldest friend. Beatrix replied that she had no wish to speak of what had occurred, and that she hoped they both would forget it as soon as possible. Hereupon Jocelyn took his leave, and went back to New York, probably regretting the issue of the adventure almost as much as he professed to do, although perhaps for reasons other than those he thought it expedient to allege.

The third event was the death of poor Professor Dorimar, which occurred suddenly and filled Beatrix with grief, notwithstanding that it appeared in one sense the most natural thing that could have happened to the good and magnanimous old man. He had had a habit of looking upward as he talked, and Beatrix had thought that he seemed much of the time communing with a better world, and perhaps derived from some angelic source his grand ideas about music and its mission to mankind. It was the first death the girl had ever witnessed, and it invested the three years of the association together of the pupil and her master with a sort of retrospective sanctity. They had been altogether the happiest years of Beatrix's life. The professor had taught her something else besides how to sing. Less by words than by some tacit, sympathetic influence he had led her to perceive and meditate upon the nobler and loftier aspects and capacities of human nature. As to his share in her vocal culture and her own proficiency he never had made any definite pronouncement; but on the morning before his death he requested her to sing for him the air from Handel's oratorio of "The Messiah"—"I know that my Redeemer liveth." When she had finished he said: "My child, you have enabled me to thank God that my voice was destroyed, and that my life has been for so many years a lonely disappointment. I have had triumphs and blessings that most men do not even know how to desire. A mighty scepter is in your hand," he went on, turning his grave and gentle eyes upon her. "I have helped to show you how to wield it. Power is very sweet, but it needs almost an angel not to use it harmfully. I don't know what life may be before you, my dear; but whatever it may be I trust that when you come to the end of it you will find as little cause to regret having met me as I have much cause to rejoice that I have known you." Beatrix hardly knew how to understand this at the time, but afterward the words frequently revisited her memory, and may have had some influence over her at critical moments of her career.

In autumn the old Randolph homestead looked as if it were showered with gold. The great elm trees, transmuted by the touch of this Midas of the seasons, stood in a yellow glory of myriad leaves, which every breath of the cool west breeze scattered profusely eastward, where, with the still unchanged grass, they formed a spangled carpet of green and gold. The apples thronged the crooked boughs of the orchard, some like glowing rubies, others like the famous fruit of the Hesperides, though there was no guardian dragon to give them a fictitious value. The broad roof of the house itself was littered with innumerable little golden scales, of workmanship far beyond the skill of any human goldsmith, yet of absolutely no market value. What is the significance of this yearly phantasmagoria of illimitable riches, worthless because illimitable? Is it a satire or a consolation? Does it mock the poor man's indigence or cause him to hope again for competence? It comes as the guerdon of Nature, after her mighty task is done; but when she has composed herself to her wintry sleep it is trodden into the earth and forgotten, and the new year begins his labors with new sap and naked buds. It is only the human world that has to bear the burden of inheritance; and perhaps we shall never enjoy true wealth till we have learned the lesson of the trees.

Poor Mr. Randolph certainly had little else beside autumn leaves wherewith to satisfy his creditors, and the winter of his discontent was close upon him. There is a philosophy for the poor and a philosophy for the wealthy, but the philosophy that can console the debtor has yet to be discovered.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]